

A Short History of the Census



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Public Information Office
History Branch
U.S. Census Bureau

Objective

To provide historical information and context
for the evolution of the decennial census
1790-2010

Overview

- Early Census History: 1790-1840
- Redefining the Census: 1850-1900
- Transition: 1902-1930
- Modernization: 1940-2010
- Telling the Story

Disclaimers

- Historic census records are maintained and released by the National Archives and Records Administration, not the U.S. Census Bureau
- Historical content on the Census Bureau history site and in historical census documents may contain outdated terminology or views which, reflecting the authors' attitudes or that of the period in which the item was written, may be considered to be inappropriate or offensive today

Why Take a Census?

- Mandated by Constitution (Article I, Section 2, Clause 3)
- Apportionment of representatives
- Not used for conscription or punitive taxation
- Supreme Court has ruled that this covers other statistical collection as needed for “intelligent exercise of other powers enumerated in the Constitution”

Early Censuses: 1790-1840

- 1790 – US Marshals conduct enumeration
- 1800 – Only whites tallied by age
- 1810 – Census of Manufactures added
- 1820 – Foreigners not naturalized added
- 1830 – Uniform printed schedule
- 1840 – Revolutionary War pensioners

346

Schedule of the whole families of Primes in the Town of Hampton

Newport County
R. I.

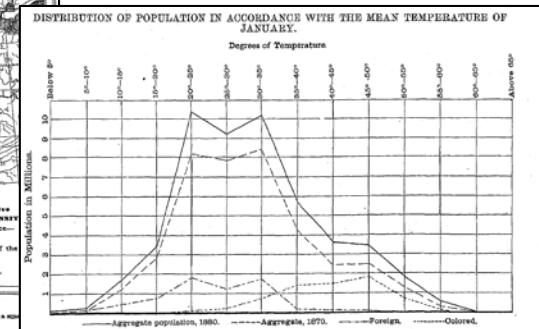
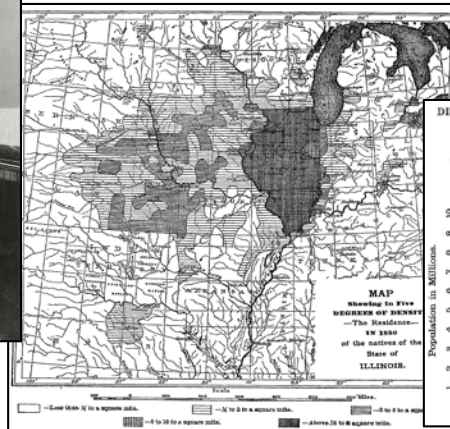
Name of each of Families

<i>Ab. Westcott</i>	1	2	3	1	9
<i>Thomas Riggs</i>	1	2	3	-	-
<i>William Parker</i>	1	-	3	-	-

[illegible]

Redefining the Census: 1850-1900

- 1850 – Individual becomes unit of data collection
- 1860 – American Indian added to list of races
- 1870 – Beginning of modern statistical analysis
- 1880 – Professional enumerators
- 1890 – Hollerith tabulating machine
- 1900 – All American Indians enumerated on the general schedule



Transition: 1902-1930

- 1902 – Permanent Census Bureau established
- 1905 – Economic census separated from decennial census
- 1910 – Usual place of abode become basis
- 1911 – Number of seats in House of Representatives set at 435
- 1920 – No apportionment after census
- 1930 – Congress only specifies subjects, not questions

A black and white photograph of a census form titled "THIRTEENTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES: 1910 - INDIAN POPULATION". The form is a large, multi-column table with many rows of data. It includes a section for "SPECIAL INQUIRIES RELATING TO INDIANS" and a section for "INSTRUCTIONS FOR FILLING THIS SCHEDULE". The form is filled with handwritten data.

Modernization: 1940-2010

1940 – Introduction of statistical sampling

1950 – American abroad enumerated

1951 – UNIVAC I

1960 – Use of FOSDIC

1970 – Use of computerized address lists

1980 – Mail-out/Mail-back

1990 – TIGER system used to produce maps

2000 – First paid advertising campaign

2005 – American Community Survey (ACS) replaces the Long Form

2010 – All households receive same 10 questions



Telling the Story

History Web Site: <http://www.census.gov/history>

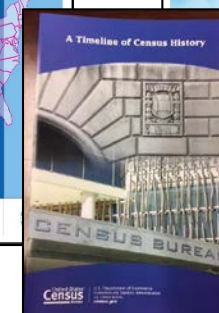
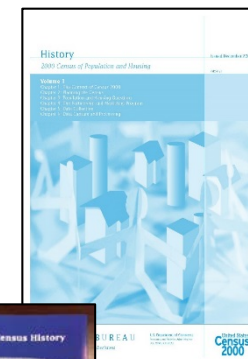
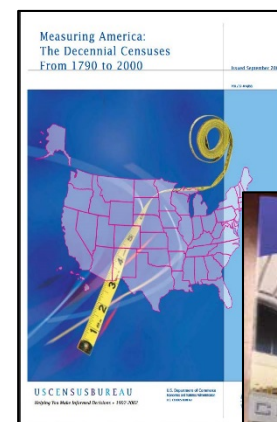


Telling the Story

Artifact displays



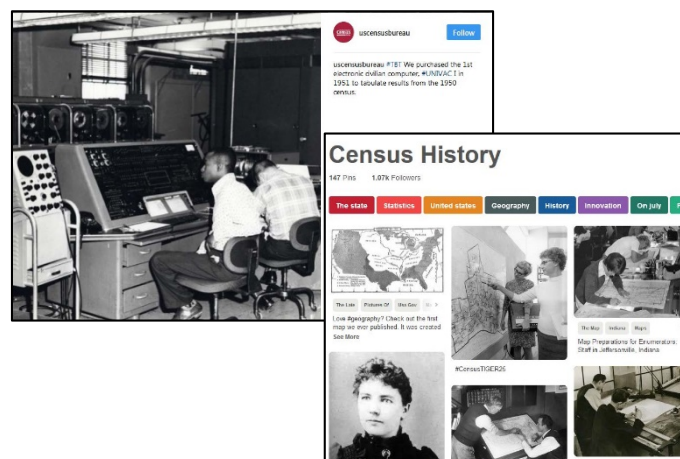
Publications



Articles



Social Media



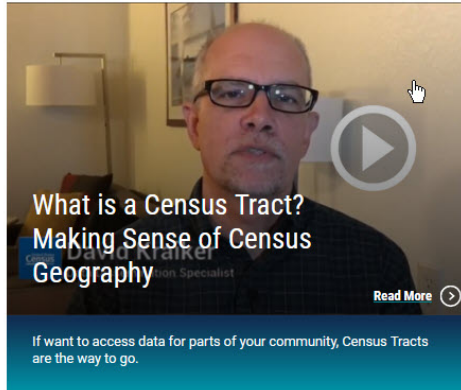
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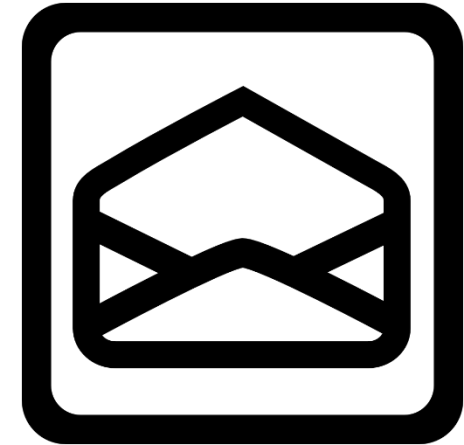
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Questions?

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